***Jeremiah 5:15-31 Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel,” says the Lord. “It is a mighty nation, It is an ancient nation, A nation whose language you do not know, Nor can you understand what they say. 16Their quiver is like an open tomb; They are all mighty men. 17And they shall eat up your harvest and your bread, Which your sons and daughters should eat. They shall eat up your flocks and your herds; They shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; They shall destroy your fortified cities, In which you trust, with the sword. 18“Nevertheless in those days,” says the Lord, “I will not make a complete end of you. 19And it will be when you say, ‘Why does the Lord our God do all these things to us?’ then you shall answer them, ‘Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours.’ 20“Declare this in the house of Jacob And proclaim it in Judah, saying, 21‘Hear this now, O foolish people, Without understanding, Who have eyes and see not, And who have ears and hear not: 22Do you not fear Me?’ says the Lord. ‘Will you not tremble at My presence, Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, By a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it? And though its waves toss to and fro, Yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it. 23But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; They have revolted and departed. 24They do not say in their heart, “Let us now fear the Lord our God, Who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest.” 25Your iniquities have turned these things away, And your sins have withheld good from you. 26‘For among My people are found wicked men; They lie in wait as one who sets snares; They set a trap; They catch men. 27As a cage is full of birds, So their houses are full of deceit. Therefore they have become great and grown rich. 28They have grown fat, they are sleek; Yes, they surpass the deeds of the wicked; They do not plead the cause, The cause of the fatherless; Yet they prosper, And the right of the needy they do not defend. 29Shall I not punish them for these things?’ says the Lord. ‘Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?’ 30“An astonishing and horrible thing Has been committed in the land: 31The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so.
But what will you do in the end?***

We’re back with Jeremiah tonight, as he prophesies the coming of Babylon. Again, this is decades before the events actually happen. Babylon is on the rise. Assyria is on the decline. Cities are falling to the Chaldeans and the Babylonians, but Jerusalem has not yet been conquered. Jeremiah is crying in the streets, looking to the great men, the priests, and the people, but he sees that the righteousness of Jerusalem and Judah is less than that of Sodom and Israel. The people are called to repent, but continue to walk in their wickedness. Tonight, we hear God’s judgement and know that it happened just as He promised.

Verses 15-18 *Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel,” says the Lord. “It is a mighty nation, It is an ancient nation, A nation whose language you do not know, Nor can you understand what they say. 16Their quiver is like an open tomb; They are all mighty men. 17And they shall eat up your harvest and your bread, Which your sons and daughters should eat. They shall eat up your flocks and your herds; They shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; They shall destroy your fortified cities, In which you trust, with the sword. 18“Nevertheless in those days,” says the Lord, “I will not make a complete end of you.* I will bring a nation – Jeremiah is describing the Chaldeans. Indeed, we know that Babylon is 900 miles from Jerusalem, and Ezra said that it too four months to travel one to the other. They are mighty in power and very courageous. He states that they are an ancient nation. Scholars can trace them to around 1000 BC, but some claim they are even older. They were of a different language, sometimes called old Aramaic. In verse 17, Jeremiah states that they’ll eat the bread and harvest, meaning out of both the field and the homes. They’ll eat the food meant for the children. They’ll eat the flocks and herds, meant for food and also sacrifice. The produce of vineyards and fig trees will be devoured. They will besiege and destroy the walled cities in which the people trust, but God will not make an end of the people, keeping a remnant to return in the future.

Verse 19 *And it will be when you say, ‘Why does the Lord our God do all these things to us?’ then you shall answer them, ‘Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours.’* Humans don’t change. The people, like people today, think pretty highly of themselves and their righteousness and godliness. They wonder why God has treated them this way. They believe themselves innocent victims. But they are guilty. God tells Jeremiah – You shall answer them. God’s desires obedience over sacrifice. Disobedience brings with it consequences. Though repeatedly warned, the people have forsaken God and His commandments. God says – You have forsaken Me and served foreign gods. So, now they will serve foreign kings in a land that is not theirs, 900 miles from home. We either serve God as Master and King, or we serve the world as master and king. We cannot serve two masters.

Verses 20-21 *Declare this in the house of Jacob And proclaim it in Judah, saying, 21‘Hear this now, O foolish people, Without understanding, Who have eyes and see not, And who have ears and hear not:* Jeremiah is told to declare this in the house of Jacob. Hear this Oh ignorant and foolish people, with no understanding. You have been blind to the relationship and goodness of God. The people have ignored wisdom and counsel, being willfully blind and deaf to God’s voice. These words were probably not well received, because it didn’t go with what the people wanted to believe.

Verses 22-24 *Do you not fear Me?’ says the Lord. ‘Will you not tremble at My presence, Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, By a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it? And though its waves toss to and fro, Yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it. 23But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart; They have revolted and departed. 24They do not say in their heart, “Let us now fear the Lord our God, Who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest.”* ***Do*** *you not fear Me?’* God ascribes this foolishness not to ignorance of His commands, but to a lack of respect and reverence of God. They have seen His power and know the stories of old about His deliverance, yet they walk in blindness. God reminds them that He set the boundaries of the sea, allowing the waters to come this far and no farther. This is a visible reminder of His authority and power. The tides come in and go out, the waves come and go, but they don’t prevail against the ground.  *But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart* having the idea that these people are more unruly than unruly waves and tides, having an obstinate and rebellious heart, refusing to return to God. They persist in their evil, no matter the judgement all around them. *They do not say in their heart* They fail to consider their ways and their God. They follow their own perverse desires and seek pleasure and ease. They never stop and say – Let us fear the Lord, meaning obey God. They no longer seek to be acceptable in God’s sight. They never stop to see how God has given the seasons and the harvests, recognizing that without His blessing, they will come to ruin. And so it is today, as we see disasters, calamities, and ruin of so many things, the people fail to turn back and cry out to God. God has kept His promises and blessed us, even as we forget Him. His Goodness never changes, but His flow of blessings decrease as disobedience and rebellion closes the valve.

Verses 25-29 *Your iniquities have turned these things away, And your sins have withheld good from you. 26‘For among My people are found wicked men; They lie in wait as one who sets snares; They set a trap; They catch men. 27As a cage is full of birds, So their houses are full of deceit. Therefore they have become great and grown rich. 28They have grown fat, they are sleek; Yes, they surpass the deeds of the wicked; They do not plead the cause, The cause of the fatherless; Yet they prosper, And the right of the needy they do not defend. 29Shall I not punish them for these things?’ says the Lord. ‘Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?* ***Your*** *iniquities have turned these things away –* The wicked are found among the people of Judah. God need not search in any heathen nations. They lie in wait using cunning and fraud to prey upon others and enrich themselves. They set traps and catch men. We saw that with Jezebel and Naboth. We saw this when the Jews set an ambush for Paul. As a cage of birds, or like a fowler that snares birds, they live in houses filled with goods and plunder received by dishonesty and robbery, defrauding brothers and sisters. They have grown fat, living in ease and taking every sensual delight. They surpass the deeds of the wicked, oppressing the orphan, cheating the widow, defrauding the honest. They celebrate their dishonesty and others look on in admiration. God is saying that they have exceeded all others in wickedness. Shall I not avenge Myself? God asks. Of course, the answer is yes. Nations earn the judgement of God by their worship of the world and their disobedience. It was true then and it’s true now.

Verses 30-31 *An astonishing and horrible thing Has been committed in the land: 31The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?* ***An*** *astonishing and horrible thing Has been committed in the land.* The wickedness and the crime is astonishing, beyond the mind of a man to comprehend. These should be so repulsive to the righteous that even the thought brings revulsion. And all of this exists in the Promised Land, a gift from God to His people. That makes it even more horrible. The priests and the prophets speak pleasing things to the people, placing their interests and enrichment above the good of the people, using authority to enrich themselves. *And My people love to have it so.* The people fall right in and love to have their ears tickled with the pleasantness they want to hear. They are never called to repent, never reminded of their duty to God, never called out to examine their lives, and never reminded of where they will spend eternity. The people love it. Isaiah 30:10, referring to the rebellious of Israel, says - *Who say to the seers, “Do not see,” And to the prophets, “Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits.* What will be the end? Utter ruin.

And so it is today. People see the wickedness, but do little to drive the wickedness from their own heart, their own thoughts. Churches want to hear the pleasant and grow upset when sin and hell are preached. In many countries speaking the Word of God in public is an arrestable offense – China – yes, Russia- yes, India – yes, but also Norway, Finland, Britain, and Canada. It’s not so far away here. But we have Hope in Jesus. We continue to pray for our nation and our world. We continue to speak to those we encounter. People are saved one by one, disciple by disciple. People return to Christ one by one. May we forever be resolute in our obedience to God, seeking His Presence, and forever following His commands.